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INFORMATION REPORT CONFIDENTIAL

CD NO.

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COUNTRY

SUBJECT

Indochina/Thailand

Prince Souphanavong-Ho Chi Minh Government

Relationship;

Background Information on "Free Lao" Movement

PLACE ACQUIRED DATE OF IN

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SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO.



- Although the Lac-Issara government-in-Exile has been dissolved, the Viet Minh still needs the active assistance of anti-French Cambodian and Lactian groups. The Viet Minh Tong-bo accordingly decided to "pick up" Prince Souphanavong again after a six-month period of feuding. The Viet Minh are apparently keeping Souphanavong and his brother Prince Petcharat under control by the following method: They tell Prince Petcharat that he should rightfully be on the throne of Laos but that the French prefer a puppet and are consequently supporting the present king. The Viet Minh leaders promise Petcharat and his "Free Lac" supporters to aid them in the drive toward "final victory." To put weight behind their promises, the Viet Minh has presented Prince Petcharat from time to time with fairly large sums of money. These sums are reputed to have ranged from 5,000 to 300,000 bant at a time. On the other hand, the Viet Minh flatters Souphanavong by telling him that, while his brother is the lawful king of Laos, Petcharat is a vain and selfish man and it would be disasterous if he really had the power in his hands. Souphanavong, according to the Viet Minh, would have to guide Petcharat. To do this he would need a powerful army which the Viet Minh would help him build.
- 2. Souphanavong thought it would be better for him to build an army of his own without consulting the Viet Minh. He, therefore, hired Chinese Nationalist troops as mercenaries. In retaliation Viet Winh authorities, instead of dividing the reputed 300,000 bant subsidy between both of the Princes, gave all the money to Petcharat while Souphanavong was away, knowing that Petcharat would not divide it. This move proved effective since it largely deprived Souphanavong of the means of paying his troops.
- 3. When Princess Souphanavong heard of the affair she immediately sent her husband a telegram telling him the story. Souphanavong became angry, severed relations with the Viet Minh, and moved to his present house on Sathorn Road in Bangkok. When word of all this became generally known, Souphanavong was deserted by his other financial supporters and by his deputy, Lt. Vixien. The hired soldiers became bandits.
- 4. Following the formal dissolution of the Lao Issara government in exile, Souphanavong gave a party at the Pacific Hotel. He declared then that he would fight the French until final victory. This drew the attention of the

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Viet Minh authorities in Bangkok, and communications between them and Ho Chi Minh headquarters were exchanged on possible future usefulness of the Lao leader. Several days later the message came from Ho Chi Minh to Souphanavong, stating that President Ho had always been anxious to cooperate with Souphanavong and inviting him to come see President Ho in person.* Souphanavong is thus once again enjoying Viet Minh favor.**

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extended by Ho Chi Minh to Prince Souphanavong and Souphanavong's departure for Viet Nam. reported that Prince Souphanavong did not intend to return to Bangkok in the near future.

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The Viet Minh is interested in Princes Petcharat and Souphanavong mainly for propaganda value, to show the world that the Lactian affair is far from settled.

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It is evident that the Ho Chi Minh Government has a substantial and continuing interest in Laos. The terrain of Laos forms a natural protective barrier to Viet Nam, is of some value economically, could serve as an outlet for population pressure in the Tonkin delta, and is the connecting link between Vietnamese in Viet Nam and in Northeastern Thailand. If Viet Nam entertains expansionist ambitions, it is very natural that they would be interested in Laos. Militarily, if they can keep French troops tied down in that area, this weakens the French opposition correspondingly in Viet Nam. And, finally, if the Viet Minh government is Communist controlled and obedient to the dictates of the world leaders of Communism, it is natural that, as Communists, they would be amious to pick up Laos as one more step forward in their drive toward control of all Asia. In this game the ambitious and continually bickering princes are obviously no more than pawns, now being used by the Viet Minh as a matter of immediate advantage.

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